

Pegida and the rightward shift in German politics

Christoph Dreier
3 January 2015

From the onset, the right-wing movement "Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West" (Pegida) was largely manufactured by the establishment parties and the media. Now, government officials are using the mobilization of these far-right mobs to organize a political shift to the right and implement an extremely reactionary programme.

In the current issue of news weekly *Der Spiegel*, former Interior Minister and current Vice-leader of the Union (Christian Democratic Union-Christian Social Union, CDU-CSU), Hans-Peter Friedrich (CSU), embraces the right-wing demonstrators and calls for the adoption of their programme.

First, he says "people's desire for cultural identity" is at the root of the racist demonstrations. The participants raise "legitimate questions", the ex-minister says, claiming that "we have dealt too lightly in the past with the question of the identity of our people and our nation."

He accuses German Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) of "swimming along with the mainstream opinion polls" and of neglecting conservative values. For this reason, he says, the right-wing anti-euro party Alternative for Germany (AfD) will become a "mortal danger" for the *Union*.

To prevent an "extra-parliamentary opposition from the right," the conservative union must take up the issues raised by Pegida and the AfD. Friedrich links his defence of Pegida with the demand for a "business-oriented" policy. He calls for the "protection of property" and opposes a minimum wage and rent controls.

Friedrich received support from CDU domestic affairs expert Wolfgang Bosbach, who told Berlin's *Tagesspiegel*: "If a new centre-right party is established, this is a challenge for the Union." The head

of the CSU small-medium business wing, Hans Michel Bach, demanded: "The Union must ensure that the bourgeois camp is not divided. Such a split would only benefit the political left."

The CDU in Saxony, which has had close ties to the far right, announced it would implement Pegida's demands. "We want to provide an honest assessment of what failures there are," said current Saxony CDU General Secretary Michael Kretschmer.

He announced that the CDU would seek to accelerate the procedures for asylum applications to ensure faster deportations. Refugees must make greater "efforts towards integration", Kretschmer said.

The thrust of this xenophobic propaganda was clear made by the influential economist and director of the Munich-based Ifo Institute Hans Werner Sinn on Monday in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. In a cynical numbers game, he tries to prove that immigration costs the German government more than immigrants contribute to society. In his view, what is needed is "an ideology-free debate on migration policy, and [one] not driven by the quest for political correctness".

Sinn places the dismantling of the welfare state at the center of the debate, calling it a "magnet for the low-skilled". He proposes to "restrict the principle of inclusion, the access of immigrants to the benefits of the welfare state". To this end, he proposes a model in which migrants can be expelled if they have not found a job within six months. Furthermore, they should not receive benefits such as tax allowances or child benefit in the first four years of their stay.

The programme formulated by Sinn is directed not only against immigrants but against all workers in Germany. It would turn immigrants into slaves without rights who are forced to accept work under all

conditions to escape deportation. This army of immigrant slaves should then be used in order to smash the working conditions of all workers and further undermine welfare provision.

The remarks by Friedrich, Bosbach and Sinn make clear what is involved in Pegida. The movement is not a spontaneous expression of widespread sentiments, but the conscious mobilization of the fascistic dregs of society. The first small weekly Pegida demonstrations not only received much media attention, but also the support of representatives of all parties represented in parliament.

From the Left Party state premier of Thuringia, Bodo Ramelow, to CSU chief Horst Seehofer, all signaled their political willingness to talk with the protesters. Newspapers and television stations have regurgitated Pegida's far-right nostrums.

The media hype and staged demonstrations are now being used to push through deeply reactionary politics. It is not just about the destruction of the welfare state in Germany and throughout Europe, as Sinn demands, but also about the re-militarization of German foreign policy. For some time, Pegida's anti-immigrant positions have been combined with an extreme form of anti-Americanism and the demand for an independent role for Germany in world affairs.

Despite continuing media propaganda, the vast majority of the German population rejects foreign combat missions by the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces). The Pegida campaign serves to mobilize right-wing, backward layers to intimidate this opposition. As in the past, the return of German militarism is accompanied by the revival of nationalism and chauvinism. After having worked in Ukraine with the fascists of Svoboda, the German elite is now looking to the brown mob at home to achieve their goals.

The vast majority of the population rejects the far-right marches, where AfD representatives march alongside numerous functionaries of the fascist German National Party (NPD). The counter-demonstrations regularly attract significantly more participants than the Pegida rallies.

Just before Christmas, the website *change.org* hosted a petition entitled "For a multi-coloured Germany--a million signatures against Pegida". In the space of a few days it has received more than 245,000 signatures.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact